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ABSTRACT

This paper examines specific problems facing community service delivery in rural Australia and efforts to overcome these deficiencies. The generic term "rural" is advantageous in that it delineates particular problems facing rural communities, aids in resource allocation, raises public awareness of rural disadvantage, and provides an understanding of qualitative factors associated with rural living. Disadvantages of using such a broad categorization include the lumping together of nonrelated communities, perpetuation of rural myths, and stigmatization of all rural communities as disadvantaged. Common problems of rural community service delivery include distance, isolation, and coordination of services; lack of infrastructure and resources; recruitment of service professionals; limited skill base of service delivery agencies; increased demands upon community organizations concerning accountability and outcomes; and poorly defined roles for local government. Past models of rural service delivery have failed because they were based on urban models, used culturally inappropriate practices, or did not integrate services. The Division of Community Services Development (Queensland) has sought to overcome these deficiencies by developing programs through a participatory local planning process that emphasizes building community self-reliance. Programs provide integrated services based on local priorities, deliver emergency relief and social support services to farm families in drought areas, promote social-impact assessment of development projects, provide "limited hours" child care, and help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island women to develop local child and family services. Contains 15 references. (LP)

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DELIVERING COMMUNITY SERVICES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The use of the term 'rural' commonly categorises a broad group of non-metropolitan communities, many of which experience similar social and economic conditions. Because of the unique issues and problems they face, defining such communities in this way is a useful construct in the design and delivery of appropriate and effective community services. However, this broad categorisation does not reflect a variety of other factors which differentiate among such communities. Practical and value-related differences clearly exist, for example, between Aboriginal, mining and farming communities in rural areas.

Whether we talk of rural communities in the broad or more definitive sense, past models of community service delivery have had trouble identifying and meeting specific community needs. This paper aims to clarify some of the advantages and disadvantages of using the 'rural' construct before outlining some of the specific problems facing community service delivery in rural areas. It also aims to illustrate how, in recent years, the Division of Community Services Development (CSD) within the Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs (DFSAIA) has sought to overcome these deficiencies. CSD has trialled a number of initiatives in community services delivery. These initiatives have sought to meet the diverse needs of communities within rural areas by applying more community-based approaches. They include the Drought Worker Support Scheme, Rural Social Adjustment Advisers, Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care, Limited Hours Child Care, improved Social Impact Assessment processes and the Cross Program Funding Initiative.

INTRODUCTION

The generic term 'rural' is often used to categorise a broad range of non- metropolitan communities. Because of the unique issues and problems they face, defining such communities in this way is a useful construct in the design and delivery of appropriate and effective community services. However, this broad categorisation does not reflect other factors which may differentiate such communities.

This paper briefly explores some of the pros and cons of using the 'rural' construct to categorise such a diverse group of communities

and localities. While no definitive position is reached, the discussion suggests that while the construct has its uses, its limitations must also be kept in mind in the design of appropriate and effective community services. Viewing any community in a stereotypical fashion can have negative consequences for community service delivery.

Keeping this in mind, and whether we talk of rural communities in the broad or more' locally definitive sense, this paper suggests that past models of community service delivery have suffered from muddled perceptions of what constitutes a rural community and how they operate. Past approaches have often had trouble identifying and meeting specific rural community needs. To explore these deficiencies, the paper identifies some of the problems facing community service delivery in rural areas.

Finally, the paper illustrates how, in recent years, the Division of Community Services Development (CSD) within the Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs (DFSAIA) has sought to overcome these deficiencies. CSD has trialled a number of initiatives in rural community services delivery. Reflections from several key CSD field and policy operators show how these initiatives have sought to meet the diverse needs of communities within rural areas by applying more community-based approaches.

USING THE RURAL CONSTRUCT: IS IT APPROPRIATE?

Before examining the performance of past and current models of rural community service delivery, the appropriateness of the generic construct for policy and program purposes must be explored. While the term 'rural' generally applies to non-urban areas, it is often applied in varying contexts which meld international definitions which distinguish between 'urban', 'rural' and 'remote' (ABS 1992). Certainly there are variations in how the term is applied between State Government agencies in Queensland and across Australia.

Centacare Australia and the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission (1993) contend that applied definitions of the term may incorporate a range of parameters,including specific distances from major urban centres, perceptions of local populations and the availability of and access to services. They further contend that the definition used often depends on the aims of the decision maker, making it difficult to reach a definitive statement on what is 'rural' or 'remote'.

While the application of this 'rural' construct is useful in the design and delivery of appropriate and effective community services, the broad categorisations applied often do not reflect a variety of other factors which differentiate among such communities. The following explores some of the arguments for and against use of the 'rural' construct.

Advantages of Using the Rural Construct

The use of the 'rural' construct remains pervasive within Government service delivery (e.g., Office of Rural Communities 1993). Some reasons why this remains so can be summarised as follows:

(i) Defining Specific SocioEconomic Disadvantages

One of the most obvious advantages of using the construct is that it delineates the particular problems facing people living in these areas, allowing decision makers to build weightings into processes used to determine resources for the delivery of human and infrastructure services. Such weightings need to be decided on a differential basis for various communities.

(ii) Raising Rural Community Profiles

Another advantage of the construct is that it raises public awareness of rural disadvantage, requiring resources for the delivery of services. This is one of the reasons behind the Queensland Government's recent release of its first Rural Communities Policy Package through the Office of Rural Communities.

(iii) Qualitative Concepts

Defining the 'rural' construct is also useful in that it provides appropriate conceptual boundaries to understand qualitative factors associated with living rurally. Rural communities and lifestyles are the subjects of research in their own right. Use of the 'rural' construct is essential if research is to be focused.

Disadvantages of Using the Rural Construct

Broad categorisation of rural communities can also have its disadvantages. Some of these include:

(i) Lumping of Non-Related Communities

Use of the broad 'rural' construct does not reflect the variety of factors which differentiate constituent communities. Socioeconomic and value-related differences exist, for example, between Aboriginal, mining and farming communities in rural areas. This makes the generic application of designated 'rural' community service delivery models potentially dangerous (e.g., see Smith 1989a).

(ii) Debunking Rural Myths

Blanket application of the 'rural' construct also may perpetuate common but unrealistic perceptions or myths about rural living (see Phillips 1993). Many such myths can be quickly debunked by primary social research.

Some of the most common myths centre upon notions of 'community' and 'rural lifestyle' and expectations about rural service delivery. Consequently, current thinking about 'innovative service models' may often be based on hearsay and rural myth rather that sound social theories and data analysis.

(iii) Stigmatisation by Classification

Use of the 'rural' construct itself may stigmatise communities as being 'disadvantaged' in some way. In the experience of CSD officers, many rural residents would argue that they have a high standard of living and resent the use of generic classifications to denote their perceived disadvantage.

(iv) Definitions of Community

There are remarkable similarities between past efforts to reach consensus on the meaning of the term 'community' and the term 'rural' (see Smith 1 989b). Rural townships, for example, may harbour several 'communities of interest', and can not be viewed as homogenous groupings for the purpose of delivering community services (see Roberts and Pettsch 1993).

Finding a Balance

Clearly, there are pros and cons to using the 'rural' construct to define the parameters of policy and program development and service delivery. While the generic classification has its uses, its limitations must also be acknowledged. Viewing any community in a stereotypical fashion can result in the failure of the community service delivery model applied.

The remainder of this paper refers to rural communities as those which suffer some form of locational disadvantage. It does not, however, refer to communities as geographically, economically and socially homogenous entities.

PROBLEMS FACING COMMUNITY SERVICE DELIVERY IN RURAL AREAS

There has been a great deal documented on problems related to community service delivery in rural communities. However, the issues differ with the nature of the 'problem' that the service is directed towards. One only need to consider the different factors at play in the establishment of a domestic violence response service in a small rural community compared to the establishment of more preventative services (see Taylor 1988; Coorey and Taylor 1989).

Many of the problems are characteristic of the types of factors that are commonly used to define the 'rural' construct (e.g., distance/isolation). Others arise from the misapplication of the construct via poorly conceived and inflexible service delivery models that do not build upon the self-reliance of local communities. Some of the major problems can be summarised as

follows, and, where not otherwise referenced, relate to the typical field experiences of CSD regional and policy officers.

(i) Distance, Isolation and Coordination

Distance and isolation remain among the primary barriers to effective community service delivery in rural areas. Consequent costs to resource small rural communities and to travel are high. The frequent use of fax's, telelinks, and computers remain an integral part of service development.

However, apart from the cost implications for the practical delivery of services, distance and isolation profoundly influence administrative coordination. Poor coordination among State and Federal government departments, Local government and service deliverers is a major challenge to the effective development of services (see Synapse 1994). Greater coordination efficiencies would strengthen the output of the existing but limited resource base.

The Queensland Government has, in part, developed its current Rural Communities Policy Package in response to a perception that local government and non- government providers often deal with a range of agencies with varying funding criteria, administrative arrangements and boundaries and accountability procedures. Similar problems have also been experienced in other Australian states (see Office of Rural Affairs 1991:154).

(ii) Lack of Infrastructure and Resources

A general lack of resources and community services infrastructure remains a problem in rural areas. In many small communities, the funds, facilities and personnel may simply not be sufficient to establish viable or ongoing services. Often small communities are not able to demonstrate demand for services at the same level as urban centres.

(iii) Attracting Service Professionals

Queensland rural communities have long suffered from the inability to attract and retain professional service deliverers and community sector workers. Similar problems have been experienced elsewhere in Australia (e.g., see Office of Rural Affairs 1991:154). In other cases, qualified local residents may not always be deemed the most appropriate people to carry out local community service activities.

(iv) Skills Available in Rural Towns

Operating a community service is increasingly becoming a skilled task, requiring considerable training and resourcing. Limits to the skills base of service delivery agencies has a direct affect on the management capacity of these organisations. Stakeholders in the delivery of services in small communities are often fully committed with other tasks. Practical training opportunities need to be planned and coordinated, and this is often difficult in itself.

(v) Increasing Demands Upon Community Organisations

As in urban areas, increasing pressure is being applied by all levels of Government and the community regarding quality outcomes for local community services. Consumers and funding bodies are more aware of the need for accountability. As the skills needs of organisations have increased, the development of appropriate skills has not always been able to keep pace.

(vi) Poorly Defined Roles For Local Government

Increased focus on the integration of planning for social and economic development involves local government more in service development than in the past (e.g., see McCosker 1991). Local government is now often a significant stakeholder in the development of human and community service infrastructure in rural and remote areas.

Local governments in rural areas, however, often have a limited rates base and need to develop ways to advance community service issues. This may involve the collaboration of regional affiliations of councils, seeking grants, employing consultants or accessing cross program funds to plan service needs locally.

(vii) Rural Communities Need to Be Self-Reliant

Service delivery in rural areas has commonly not focussed on building the self- reliance of rural communities (Synapse 1994). In many cases this has weakened the long term resilience of these communities to market and seasonal variations, trapping individuals and families in welfare cycles.

What Implications for Community Service Delivery?

While these deficiencies are better recognised now than in past years, many of the community services development models applied in rural Australia have failed to overcome them. The following points out some of the areas in which past service delivery models have failed.

THE PERFORMANCE OF PAST SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS

In the experience of DFSAIA regional and policy officers working with rural communities, there are many signs pointing to service failure through the application of inappropriate community service models. By and large, many of the models continue to ignore the problems outlined above. Some failures witnessed by departmental officers have arisen from the following deficiencies in the models applied.

(i) Applying Urban Models to Rural Needs

Many service delivery models and program guidelines in use throughout Queensland have evolved in high need urban areas. If they are to work, these models need to be carefully adapted to meet the rural service delivery environment. The adaption process, however, can provide the opportunity for the development of 'innovative' and locally driven models. More documentation of innovative operational models is required.

Rural communities or groups often develop their own way of doing things. While they can learn from other towns, long developmental phases may be needed in service establishment. Early, community-based planning is important because of the complexity of existing community structures and differing expectations and requirements. Important factors include the presence of a supportive local government and leadership from within the community that can get people from different sectors and with different values to work together.

(ii) The Application of Culturally Inappropriate Models

Rural communities in Queensland are not always dominated by Anglo-Saxon families. Culturally appropriate models need to be applied as required. Developing community services in rural Aboriginal communities, for example, requires an understanding of the different cultural parameters at play. Whatever the case, local people need to be able to determine appropriate service delivery approaches.

CSD experience has shown that initial contacts in communities for service development should include representatives of the various groups. This is in preference to targeting an identifiable group and relying on their ability to provide a culturally appropriate service.

(iii) Myth-Based Service Delivery Models

Rural service delivery models established on the basis of rural myths are destined for failure. If the assumptions underlying service delivery models are flawed, then the model will ultimately be misdirected. Models need to be developed on appropriate and current social data and theory.

(iv) Non-Integrated Service Models

Program-based funding has, at times, facilitated the development of local service delivery systems do not integrate the non-profit, local government and commercial sectors. This has often resulted in duplication, service under-sizing and destructive conflicts over limited resources. The application of sound community-based planning processes (e.g., see ATSIC 1993) raises opportunities to resolve this problem.

In the community-based planning context, issues relating to the development of appropriately sized and resourced organisations needs careful consideration. No one community management committee can provide services across all areas of need.

CSD INITIATIVES TO OVERCOME RURAL SERVICE DELIVERY PROBLEMS

The underpinning objective of CSD is to establish 'strong, responsible communities'. CSD recognises that persisting with community service delivery models that retain many of the above deficiencies not only results in the ineffective use of Government funds, but also does not help to build the self-reliance and capacity of rural communities. Deficient models continue to reinforce welfare dependence.

As a result, CSD has, in recent years, ventured into a number of innovative services delivery models and resourcing. The following outlines a number of such initiatives by exploring the individual experiences of policy and regional officers involved in their development and operation. Each contribution details the issues that sparked the development of the initiative, briefly outlines the development of each and makes some preliminary observations of service outcomes.

Cross Program Funding

The Rural and Remote Strategy was a pilot scheme developed by CSD in 1991-92 to give rural communities the opportunity to contribute to the design of local community services. In its first years, the Strategy pooled resources from CSD subprograms (e.g., child care, disability, and community and youth) to provide communities with greater flexibility and control in the local projects which could be developed and funded.

The Strategy objectives were to provide an opportunity for small communities to effectively address their own needs and establish service models accordingly. The communities were also able to use the funding to establish a coordinated human service infrastructure which could attract and integrate other government initiatives. local government was seen as a key partner in the implementation of these projects.

Key justifications for the Strategy included the difficulties involved in establishing projects in isolated areas and the poor access rural communities have to community services.

Renamed the Cross Program Funding Initiative in 1992-93, the Strategy now operates in six rural locations, including Cooktown, Blackall, Goondiwindi, Normanton, Mundubbera and Esk/Lowood. Activities include community information and planning, coordination of volunteers and agencies, child care, family and individual support, services for older people and people with disabilities, accommodation support, emergency relief, youth projects and family violence prevention.

The Initiative sought to use community-based planning principles to enable rural communities to identify their own needs and to respond in a flexible way according to local priorities. This was done with assistance from CSD resource officers. Service models range from centre-based styles to separate services which maintain fee-for-service workers. Each community used various community planning processes, resulting in strong local ownership. Existing skills bases and the level of infrastructure available to recipient organisations were different in each case. Service development required different degrees of departmental involvement as a result.

A detailed evaluation is currently assessing the Initiative. Preliminary indications are that it provides a practical mechanism to develop services which appropriately meet local needs. It is already apparent that it has made services available to people who might otherwise have been unable to access them. Further funding was obtained by each community on the basis of the infrastructure provided by the Strategy.

Other successful outcomes for the program are shown in the high useage rate reported by the individual projects and the improved community networks and referral processes developed by the projects. Contingent on budget outcomes, the Department plans to extend the Initiative to five new localities, many in areas affected by rural adjustment processes.

Rural Family Support Program

In 1993, Queensland farm families experienced the worst drought since records were kept. As a result, CSD successfully secured funds for a six month program with the broad mandate to relieve the social stress facing affected families. Within a tight timeframe and in one of the most public social crises Queensland has seen for some time, CSD had to respond to a target group with which it was relatively unfamiliar.

As the drought worsened, newspapers reported farmers shooting livestock and watching their land blow away. This land had been passed from father to son for generations. Sons were born and raised on the farm, had only ever worked on the farm, and fully expected to bury their parents there and to continue the cycle.

This culture raised many questions for the establishment of appropriate program structures. Where would support workers be based? Who would manage them? What would they be asked to do? How would they assess the level of need, or the priority of one station over another? What could be expected of even the best qualified social worker in approaching proud and independent farm families in crisis? In servicing a family living 200 km from their closest neighbour, and 300 km from the nearest town, exactly what is it that social support means?

Because CSD has developed its expertise in delivering human services via community-based management committees, it looked for communities in which it could find management bodies that would be prepared to sponsor such a service. This led to it soon experiencing the differences in service delivery between urban and rural communities and between 'off-farm' and 'on-farm' rural culture.

Inside a month, the Department had funded the employment of three men and three women (Drought Workers) who had never met each other, and training became an early priority. CSD offered brief courses in child abuse, domestic violence and suicide prevention, social security entitlements, interpersonal skills, grief counseling, community development and stress management.

Each of the Drought Workers received a modest salary, a desk and a telephone in an office (usually in a Neighbourhood Centre). CSD targeted six drought declared areas on a map of Queensland, arranged access to vehicles and placed a high frequency radio telephone in each car. The workers had $40,000 to deliver emergency financial relief to their clients.

Within a few months, the drought strategy was receiving substantial media support. A formal program assessment by a team of experienced social and agricultural consultants rated the work of the Drought Workers as efficient and effective, and quite remarkable in the time they had been on the ground and the uncertain longevity of the initiative (see Synapse 1994).

All the Drought Workers were themselves country people not formally qualified in welfare delivery. They had previously held different jobs which required a largely autonomous role. They were very much like their clients. They were embraced by communities, spoke at meetings and to the media about their role, traveled thousands of miles in their cars, but often had difficulty convincing farm families to accept a few dollars to buy food for the cupboard, or diesel for the car.

What the farm families found most valuable was not the dollars, or the information about different schemes, subsidies and rebates, but the simple fact that somebody cared enough about their family to drive 100 km off the main road to visit. Many farm families did not want counseling or money, unemployment benefits or job retraining. Nor did they want help to quit their land with dignity.

A year later 50% of the drought declared properties are coming back to life. Crops are being sown and livestock are being returned to graze. Some families have had enough and are getting out. Not many have been evicted by the banks, but many tell their children that they better think of doing something else with their life, and forget about being a farmer.

The Government now recognises that drought is a periodic event, and that it is only one of a number of factors driving continued and radical restructuring in the rural industry. As such, the

program has now been extended, though the emphasis will remain on general social support for farm families. The success of the program rested on accepting that people in distress in the bush do not necessarily see themselves as disadvantaged. The service delivered must be appropriate to the culture at hand.

Social Impact Assessment Unit (SIAU)

People in rural areas are only too aware that Government decisions and large-scale development projects can have both positive and negative impacts upon their standard of living, the way that their communities function and the economy of their region. Public response from rural communities against the State Government's decision to shut a number of regional rail services in 1993 stands as testament to this understanding. In response to a growing number of similar conflicts between communities and Government decision making processes in the early 1 990s, the Fitzgerald Commission of Inquiry into the use and management of Fraser Island recommended that better social impact assessment processes needed to be established within Government.

In response to this, and in 1992, the Public Sector Management Commission recommended that DFSAIA be nominated as 'lead agency' within Government in social impact assessment issues. To operationalise this role, DFSAIA established a Social Impact Assessment Unit (SIAU) within CSD in 1993 to promote consideration of social impacts within Government decision making and the land use planning processes.

Since then, CSD regional offices and the SIAU have worked to better integrate social issues into land use planning. In relation to rural communities, this has included:

- working with large scale resource developers to ensure that, in developing projects, they identify the significance of social impacts upon rural communities;
- working within State government to develop systems that encourage greater consideration of the impact of policy and service delivery decisions upon rural communities;
- working directly with rural Local governments to assist and support them to better consider the social needs of different interests within their communities when carrying out corporate and statutory land use planning;
- working with the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) to ensure that social issues achieve an improved profile within land care and other natural resource management policies and projects;
- working to ensure the social needs of rural communities are incorporated within the various regional and sub-regional planning processes proceeding across the State.

In 1994, CSD regional offices hope to improve their resource and skill base to assist rural communities in such activities. The provision of this assistance and support extends to meeting the needs of Government departments, local government, developers and community groups.

The recent moves to improve the Department's capacity to provide direct assistance in these areas has arisen from the clear need to better integrate social and environmental issues in land use and policy decision making processes. By promoting the concept and the benefits of considering social impacts, it is hoped that decisions relating to rural areas can better consider the needs and values of rural communities.

Rural Social Adjustment Advisers

The downturn in the tobacco industry in the Mareeba/Dimbula district in north Queensland is just one example of permanent restructuring occurring in the Queensland farm sector. The impacts of such restructuring are often not limited to farmers themselves, but also affect their families, seasonal and transient workers and suppliers in surrounding communities.

To address this problem in Mareeba, an Interdepartmental Working (Social Issues) Group was established in 1993 to look at the social and economic impact of local industry restructuring to more viable agricultural crops. The Social Issues Group identified the need for someone to work as a 'Social Adjustment Adviser' to work' with communities and families affected by structural adjustment on the Tablelands.

Since then, CSD has 'been working with the Mareeba community to implement the initiative. Local meetings have included workers from the tobacco industry, growers, community groups and service organisations, the Chamber of Commerce, local government and various Government departments. These meetings resulted in the establishment of a cross sectoral community management committee to oversee the position. The position will be sponsored by the Mareeba Shire Council, which will also provide office accommodation and administrative support.

A similar position has been established in Charleville to deal with the structural adjustment resulting from drought in the south west of Queensland. While funding for these positions will be provided by the Department of Primary Industries, it will be administered by CSD regional offices. The positions will work with families affected by rural adjustment by providing information, counselling, and support to re-establish in a new locality or to make other adjustments.

Limited Hours Child Care Services

The Limited Hours Care Program is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments and is administered by DFSAIA. The program is an initiative of the Queensland Government under the 1988-1992 National Child Care Strategy, and is unique to this State.

The Commonwealth Government has provided occasional care throughout Australia in purpose-built centres since the early 1980's. These centres were often underutilised in smaller and rural communities and some proved not to be viable.

Under the National Child Care Strategy, 360 occasional care places were allocated to Queensland. The State/Commonwealth Agreement allowed for these places to be provided in either purpose-built centres or within a model of service delivery to be designed in Queensland for Queensland conditions.

The Limited Hours Care model was developed as Queensland's alternative to the existing occasional care program. It was developed around the notion of locating child care places alongside other services for families and using existing community facilities (e.g., neighbourhood centres, kindergartens). The setting up of these limited hours services was supported by a capital program to modify buildings, the development of operational guidelines and an operational subsidy funding formula.

Limited Hours Care is child care which is provided on an occasional, irregular or casual basis to families with young children. Such services operate a limited number of hours per week (up to 20) and provide small amounts of care (up to 12 hours per child per week) to small groups of around 14 children. It is particularly useful as parents in rural communities often require occasional child care to enable them to pursue activities such as sport, leisure, studies and voluntary community activities. Work practices in rural areas are also often irregular or seasonal.

Limited Hours Care was developed in particular to service Queensland's smaller rural communities, which could not sustain larger purpose-builtcentres. This model acknowledges that even though many rural families may not require full-time child care, their need for occasional care is still important to their well-being. They have a right to access the care appropriate to their situations in order to participate in the social and economic activities of their communities.

Organisations targeted were those already providing other services to families and considered to have the capacity to be responsive and sensitive to the unique needs and culture of their local community. The existing social infrastructure was used as a base upon which to establish the child care service. The formation of an entirely new community organisation drawing upon the same limited pool of volunteers was not required. New blood by way of parents using the child care service was introduced to these organisations.

The Limited Hours Care services provide support to families who may require additional support from social, legal or medical services. The co-location of the child care services advances opportunities for referral to these other services. The modification of buildings for Limited Hours Care purposes also tend to improve existing facilities, which are available for other compatible purposes when child care is not operating - approximately 50% of the working week.

Of the 360 occasional care places allocated between 1988 to 1992, 250 were established in the Limited Hours Care model in existing community facilities. There are now Limited Hours Care services operating in 60 locations.

An evaluation of the effectiveness of the program is to be conducted in 1994, and will involve consultation with community child care workers, service users, administrators, sponsor organisations and resource staff.

No growth funds are currently available to expand the program. Under the 1992- 1996 National Child Care Strategy, however, the Queensland gGvernment has negotiated an agreement that up to 40% of all funded places may be allocated in 'innovative' service models that best meet the needs of consumers.

Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care (RAATSICC)

Until recently, remote north Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities have had access to limited human services. Historically, these services were provided and controlled by the Government or churches and were delivered in ways desired by the provider rather than the recipients. A number of analysts have concluded that past service delivery in the institutional model had a limited positive impact upon the target group and engendered powerlessness (e.g., see Dale 1993).

Children in many of these communities often require access to services during periods of social/family dysfunction. The erosion of traditional family roles and responsibilities in many communities has resulted in severe pressures on family and clan groups.

In 1990, CSD established a new funding program aimed at promoting the well- being of children within their families and communities (later called RAATSICC). At the time, it was recognised that the development of community controlled services was philosophically sound, but limited in practice by the fact that there were very few incorporated organisations in these communities and limited levels of organisational development and maintenance.

CSD could have chosen to apply the program directly through Aboriginal and Islander community Councils. However, it had to be recognised that although performing a vital role in community management, the majority of Councils were composed of men, and it was accepted that children until approximately 14 years of age were the responsibility of local women.

To get the program established, in March 1991, a meeting was convened by DFSAIA in Cairns, and many respected female elders from remote Aboriginal communities were invited. Over three days, community by community, these women were asked to talk about the needs of their children, what sort of responses the community could provide to overcome these problems and what money and support would be needed. These issues were workshopped in small groups with Aboriginal facilitators and reported back to the main group.

At the time, it was stressed that there was a limit on the funds available under the program. People were asked to request money for the most important things that had to be done first. Information about the needs, the desired response and the financial support required were collated and available funds were allocated in a cooperative manner.

Appropriate applications were developed during the meeting. The women took these back to be signed by their Council on behalf of women and children. Funding was then received by the communities within 8 weeks of the meeting. Since then, the program has continued to operate in this highly participatory manner and has grown to incorporate the Torres Strait Region in a separate program.

Initially, communities requested small amounts of money to do something discreet (e.g., purchase and erect an adventure playground). These highly practical and well used services empowered the women to develop further services.

All meetings of the established Advisory Groups provide opportunities for training in financial accountability and programming skills. The majority of community organisations now perform these functions well.

The fact that the program had flexible guidelines on the projected use of the funds meant that any statement of need and any desired response could be supported. This helped to empower the women responsible for developing the desired service.

During the succeeding meetings (3 times a year) the women have learned from each other and have seen what is working in other communities. They have often adapted and used these successes for their own communities. There are now nine incorporated women's organisations sponsoring the program, as opposed to three in the initial funding round on the mainland and four in the Torres Strait. A further four groups are incorporating at present. There are 28 funded services operating in 26 different locations from Doomadgee in the Gulf to Saibai Island in the Torres Strait to Wujal Wujal in the south eastern Peninsula.

Service activities have included the development of safe and stimulating outdoor play centres, children's activity programs, child and family support centres, limited hours community kindergarten centres, long day care and child support programs. Each incorporates their communities own cultural and political imperatives in their operation and development. The outcomes from this program are currently being fully evaluated with cross-sectoral input.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This Paper has suggested that while use of the generic 'rural' construct is useful in informing the Government's policy responses to the social problems in the bush, its use should not remove the need to ensure that planning for community services is based on local needs. Service delivery models must be delivered in a way that fully encourages local participation and which seeks to address the specific economic, social and political situations facing these communities.

CSD has, in recent years, taken some key initiatives in moving towards more community-based models of service planning and delivery. It has done this by taking more participatory planning approaches, better informing and resourcing local planning processes, and through placing increasing emphasis on the need to build the self-reliance capacity of communities themselves. Given the recent successes resulting from these improved initiatives, it is certain that future policy and program developments will reflect these principles and build upon these practical experiences.

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